

via pacis

summer 1992



neighborhood news



by Wendy Bobbitt

In this issue we are including more pictures than usual of the neighborhood. This is because with all the changes the neighborhood has undergone this year you might drive through without recognizing it.

The couple of blocks in which our houses are located was selected as one of the target areas for the Stockard Engler program, and most of our homeowner neighbors received grants to fix up their houses through the program. This was really a break for those who received the money, which was in the form of forgivable loans of up to \$10,000. Several families were able to put on new roofs; others had plumbing and electrical problems corrected; several houses got new paint jobs and foundation work. This kind of investment was really needed in our area, where there are in fact many homeowners but no one has the money needed to make necessary but costly improvements.

In the vast expanse of empty lots on 8th and 9th Sts. across from Lazarus House, Sr. Stella Neill of Anawim Housing built six duplexes (twelve three-bedroom apartments) which she rents only to families with children. Finding housing is always a major problem for families staying at the Worker and we really welcome Stella's investment in families here and on 12th St. Anawim had a big open house which we attended and these apartments are beautiful, a real testimony to Stella's deep respect for the dignity of the people she serves.

"HANDY(WO)MAN'S SPECIAL"

A question frequently asked of me -- Why do you do what you do? Why do you live in that part of the city?

When I first moved to 12th Street, my friends and others told me I was a fool. Who did I think I was! What would change what they saw -- abandoned buildings, drug traffic and people who had no means of changing their lives. Where would I get the money to make these buildings habitable? Would people live in that area if the buildings were renovated?

My response was -- I believe it can be done. There is something inside of me that won't let me not do this. Besides, I am not someone to back down from a challenge.

Twelfth Street and Forest Avenue has a recent history of drugs and abandonment. The State of Iowa had taken one of the properties by forfeiture because of the criminal activity that had been operating out of the buildings. I would sit at my dining room table and watch the drug activity in front of the house. Gradually this traffic disappeared. The street was now empty. The drug traffic had left and no one was yet ready to live there.

Just north of the Anawim houses Andy Bales opened up this year the Good Samaritan apartments, a transitional program for homeless women with kids. We were really glad to see the building they are in get back into the housing market since it is a solid old apartment building which had been standing vacant for about five years. This was our top priority in planning the uses for the unoccupied lots in our neighborhood and we are glad to see some activity going on in rehabbing the two apartment buildings adjacent to Good Samaritan, which have been vacant for the same period of time.

Up the street from Lazarus the old Jewish Community Center went down last year and was replaced by a new building housing the Child Development Center, formerly at 9th and Washington. This daycare serves almost entirely low income families (including us) and Joshua, Luke and Katie can all attest personally to how good it is. A few blocks from us on University a little shopping complex has gone in with a Family Dollar, a fast food restaurant and a trinket shop. All we need now is a grocery store and a laundromat and this neighborhood will be ready to go.

As a community we have heartily welcomed the changes which have come about in the physical appearance of our neighborhood. For years the only change was when another house was boarded up, burned down or bulldozed, and to see houses getting fixed up, painted, getting new porches or windows really brings up the spirit. Most of all we are glad to see more housing opened up, housing which people can afford to live in.

Sr. Stella lives on 12th St. and is director of Anawim, which recently built six duplexes across from Lazarus House and has rehabbed a number of rental units on 12th St. for low-income people.

After the first year and one half, a developer friend and I stood on my front porch. We had renovated two duplexes and were working on our first fourplex. He said, "Stella, you'll never get that corner renovated, just tear it down." I responded, "I believe we can." He made a wager, "If you get those buildings done, I'll pay for the landscaping." Two years later he did just that.

Today these buildings are occupied by twenty five families and we have approximately 50 children living and playing in the "park."

Why would I choose this place to live and work? I believe in people, in their desire to achieve their dreams, and their capacity for change in the pursuit of their dreams. Everyone wants a place to live, a sense of belonging to a community, and the opportunity to build a new life for themselves and for their children. I saw myself as bringing the pieces together for this belief to be lived out.

We do find ourselves strongly in conflict, however, with the views of some of the people who have been most deeply involved in the efforts to rehab the area: with the River Bend Association and with some members of our own neighborhood association, North Park Neighbors. In their view, the Near North Side is saturated with services and housing for society's outcasts, and the only way property values will ever rise and the area become attractive for further economic development is to force some of this stuff out of here. Our City Council person, Tom Vlassis, is currently examining all group living situations he is aware of in our area to find out whether they may be in conflict with any city ordinances.

Our position at the beginning of the discussions surrounding Stockard Engler was, and it still is, that our neighborhood belongs to the people who live here, whether or not they attend any planning meetings or make any effort to have their wants and needs known (and they don't). Some of our neighbors live in SRO's in the huge old houses on 7th St. Many of them are elderly and barely come out of their rooms except for a little chat on the porch or on a chair in the yard. Many of them are Asian families also living in those old houses. Most of our neighbors who rent are as stable in the neighborhood as the homeowners. None of them has much money. There are also several houses in the neighborhood, our own included, which offer hospitality to people for whom there is no place, or no place they feel accepted, anywhere else.

In our discussions with the city, a major concern for us was whether rental housing would be affordable for the people whose neighborhood this is, or whether employed newcomers would be the only ones able to afford to live here. But it seems that a more direct attack is occurring on the poor, beginning with efforts to target all monies to homeowners and with a months-long campaign to prevent Sr. Stella from building on the lots on 8th and 9th Sts., and continuing with efforts to use a "quarter-mile" ordinance to close or move out "shelters" in the area.

Since the Catholic Worker first opened in this neighborhood there have been many changes here, and we ourselves have brought about some of them. But as they say about the enduring presence and patience of the poor of the third world, in the same way the people of our neighborhood just kind of flow with it and at a certain level things do not change. Because after all, where else are they going to go? We have taken our stand with the people who live here, who belong here, and we do expect to be dealing with some problems in the future, perhaps before long. We ask your continuing support.



I knew from my own life some of the difficulties and some of the pain and yet the ability to dream and hope. During the years I worked and shared in Bishop Dingman's life, he often called me to reflect on the Paschal Mystery, the mystery of life, death, and new life. It is from these reflections that I have come to understand the pain and suffering of my neighborhood, as well as the gifts of new life. It is from these reflections I know I want to walk with these people of God.

by Sr. Stella Neill

I'm writing to say thanks to all the people who have helped to complete all the projects we've done this last year. We've done so many that I can't remember all of them or all the names probably but I hope everyone knows just how much their contributions meant to us here.

I am glad to say that the rehab project on the Ligutti House is complete. I suppose to some it seems like it took us forever, but we all took our time and did a high quality job. We especially thank Sacred Heart parish which took on the renovations as a special project. I could never name all the people individually but I thank you all for your labor and contributions.

With the help of some real good friends from Norwalk, the Ligutti House just got repainted as well. There are parts on it that need a second coat but I haven't had the time and we don't have all the materials. Some of us here have talked about trying to plant some grass in the yard once we get the house painting finished, and it sure needs it, but once we're done the house will be all but new. It will be nice to have only two houses to really worry about.

We have been doing a lot of these other repairs and several different projects also. We've been working on eliminating all the leaks in our bathrooms and the kitchen in Dingman House. The kitchen counter there that Jim built was in real need of being refinished. There were several doors that needed rehanging and screens need replacing. I got the roof on Lazarus House patched, but there is no telling how long that will last. Although some friends of the community have offered to donate 25 squares of shingles all we need to do is save up to get the 60 or so sheets of plywood, nails, felt, trim and I will start to put a complete roof on.

UPDATE ON THE HOUSES

by Jeff Tedder

With the help of a couple different work groups we accomplished several other projects that the community has been wanting to do. We have a raised yard at Dingman House and the concrete retaining



wall was falling apart. We set about with sledge hammers and nearly killed ourselves. There were parts on that old wall that must have been two feet thick. We got out and put up a railroad tie wall six courses high and it will work perfect for the flower garden some others want to plant. We still need to do one more short run wall but other things take a higher priority. One major thing is room. We have several staff and since no others have been joining we have put guests in those rooms. Now we have several people who would like to join the community but we have nowhere to put them. Thank God we had a group that said they would contribute some money to a specific project so I just recently began building a new bedroom in the basement of Lazarus House. It will take a little while to finish with all the other repairs going on at the same time, but by the grace of God this will work out in the end. I'm sure I'm forgetting something but I have to get the kids their baths and put them to bed.

God bless you all.

needs

money (always needed for taxes, utilities, repairs, vehicles)
breakfast cereal
tomato products
margarine
rice
flour
canned soups
cooking oil or shortening
meat
coffee
sugar
mayonnaise
onions
potato products
dish soap
laundry soap
toothpaste
shampoo
trashbags
toilet paper
towels and washcloths
volunteers for maintenance jobs or childcare

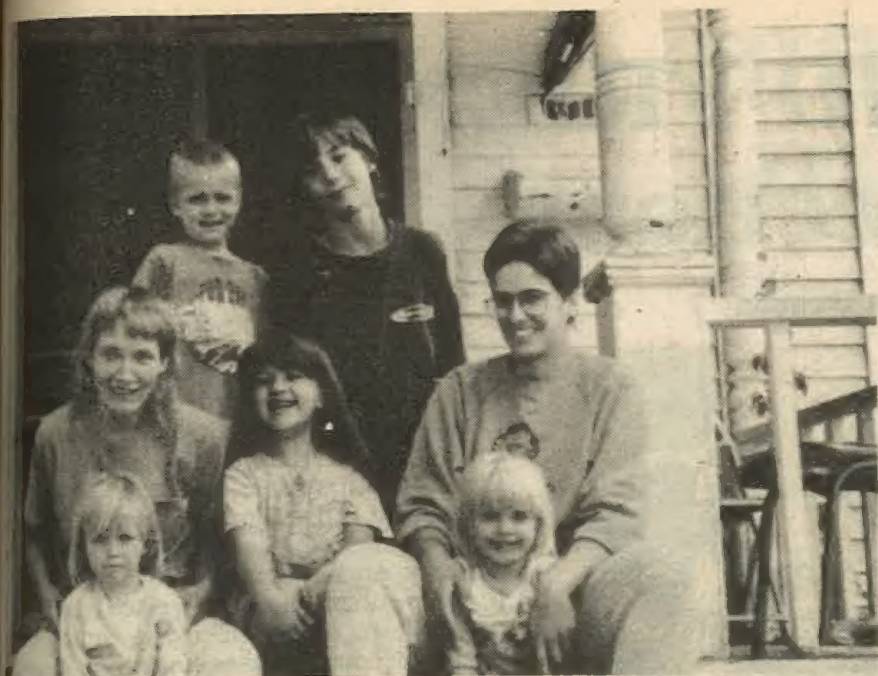
Visitors to the house have probably noticed what a struggle it is to keep up with the repairs on all the houses. Jeff has the skills to do most of them but he also has three kids and a doctor who keeps telling him he'll be paralyzed if he doesn't knock off the heavy lifting. So our latest idea for restructuring house maintenance is a list we have made up of repair needs for each house. We are hoping that a few people who have some time on a regular or occasional basis might be willing to come in, grab the list, and take off with whatever task strikes their fancy. Barry Molloy, Andy Bosman, Joe Schor and Tim Marsh have helped us out recently with some of the more glaring problems and it was such a relief to be able just to turn over to them something that had been a grating irritation for a while. There are jobs of every description that need to be done, from clearing weeds to building walls, and we appreciate help with any of them. Please stop by and check out the list.



WHO WE ARE

The Catholic Worker is a group of people striving to live out in our daily lives the Biblical mandate to love one another. We choose to live in this neighborhood where problems are many, knowing that at the end for us it is only by being here day in and day out that we can really understand and identify with the people who surround us and know how to serve them. We are a community, not an organization; we have no officers or board of directors; we are tax-exempt; we are not a shelter. We are as fulltime volunteers and are not paid for our work. As time goes on our understanding of how we can best serve our neighbors and the world changes and we respond to those changing understandings.

Through the loving support of our community we are able to own our house and to offer hospitality to those in need on a temporary and sometimes a long-term basis. We subsist entirely on the support of our wider community -- for food, clothing, household needs, repairs, money. These gifts are not tax exempt and may often go unthanked, although never unappreciated. The Worker House is a place where anyone can come to serve their neighbor in a direct and personal way. We invite you to come, get to know us and our work, and find your place in it.



COMMUNITY NEWS

It's nearly September, the kids are still out of school, and people all over Des Moines are enjoying the long summer days. Life around the Catholic Worker is always full of activity; with the warm weather, people are always coming in and out -- especially the neighborhood kids.

It's been a long time since we last published Via Pacis, and there have been a few staff changes since then. Current staff members are: Jeff, Carla, Wendy, Lori, Michael, and me - Shel. Kay comes on Wednesdays with Baby Neil, and Dennis still comes on Sunday nights when he has time. Between all of us -- we manage to keep the house fully staffed. Jeff is our resident Mr. Fix-It-All; Carla tries to keep her house clean (Lazarus) and still keep an eye on all her kids; Wendy works part time; Lori helps Jeff work and helps with the kids; Michael and I are all part-time Brethren volunteers. So we are all quite busy -- each involved with various projects.

As always, the house is overflowing with kids. We've got Jeff's three (Jeffrey, Norma, and Sheila), Carla's three (Julius, Joshua, and Jordan), and Wendy's two (Luke and Katie). Added to the neighborhood kids and the kids staying with us -- it sometimes feels as if we are running a children's commune. Sometimes it's amazing to watch how the kids interact with one another, putting aside society-imposed barriers in order to speak to one another in the universal language of play.

We do appreciate all of the friends who keep us stocked with food, supplies, just about everything we need! Without your support, our efforts wouldn't be effective. We wish you a happy summer.

In peace, **Shel Eller**



a new kid in town

Five hundred years after Columbus I came to explore the part of America that is now called "the U.S.A.!" But don't be afraid: I'll try to avoid some of the mistakes he made.

I didn't come by ship, but by plane, and my friends in Germany didn't send me to bring home gold and slaves. As Albrecht Kuestermann and Georg Bussek before me, I'm here as a BVS volunteer. Unlike Albrecht and Georg I'm not here to serve my alternative service to the German military, because I was lucky enough to fail the draft.

Five years ago, I decided to go abroad after my apprenticeship as a bookbinder. During the three years of my apprenticeship, I spent most of my free time in a "peace office" in my hometown of Nuernberg, where I gained some experience in training for non-violence and using techniques of the "theatre of the oppressed" (developed in Brazil by Augusto Boal).

As with most "peace activists", the Gulf War interrupted my normal life. I was involved in the military counselling network for American soldiers in Germany. This is one of the reasons I decided to visit this country, where these soldiers came from.

I work half time for the Catholic Worker House and the other half for Clarion Alliance. One of my projects at Clarion Alliance is 20/20 Vision, a grassroots-lobbying network for nuclear disarmament. I also hope to find a bunch of people interested in street theatre, for example as a part of the campaign for a Civilian Police Review Board. This would give me an opportunity to use some of my experience in the "theatre of the oppressed." Playing theatre fits into my philosophy that working for peace should be fun sometimes. Or, as Emma Goldman said:

If I can't dance, I don't want to take part in your revolution!

Shalom, Salaam and So long.

Michael



FAMILY AND FRIENDS

recollections

by Carla Dawson

So many people have come and gone since the last issue of Via Pacis that we want to give a little update on their whereabouts and doings as well as to pass on some news about friends and former community members we have heard from recently:

Norman has written and called a few times since March when he began his travels on foot to the east coast to see his mom. He had some great stories to tell about people he met on the road. At the moment he is at the Peoria Catholic Worker from which we have high hopes of seducing him back at a future date. (After all, he was on his way to Oregon or Washington when he arrived here in the first place.) We sure miss Norman -- he is the heart and soul of the Worker to a lot of people and we hope he'll be back before too long. His latest promise is November and we are thinking about sending him a bus ticket -- just to make sure!

Corey and Carol moved out in April and got their own place not too far from here. Carol is now working on a nursing degree at Grandview; Corey is at Drake finishing up his undergraduate degree. During their last six months in the community Corey and Carol were both fulltime students as well as bearing a major load of house responsibilities since they were the only live-in community members at Dingman House. Since leaving they have been very active committed members of the group Citizens for Police Accountability, which is working for the citizen review board, and we also expect and hope to be working closely with them should our warmaking continue to escalate. Their long-range (Carol has two years to go in her nursing program) goal is to open a small neighborhood health clinic either around here or perhaps in a bigger city but still in an inner-city neighborhood.

Albrecht Kuestermann, one of our last year's Brethren Volunteers, had to leave early because his father was very ill. Not long after Albrecht's return his father died. We would like to send our respects and best wishes to his whole family. We've heard from Albrecht a number of times. He once called us from his Elrene retreat at a pay phone that didn't accept quarters; we had a lengthy call. Albrecht is going to school in Germany and is going to pursue a law degree.

Molly, also a Brethren Volunteer here last year, moved to Buffalo where she is pursuing her degree in Art. Molly has also been working at a soup kitchen.

Kay, back on the farm in Cumming for a while, has been very busy this summer with her gardens, raising produce for the Farmer's Market. Kay left the community, or rather moved back onto volunteer status, when she was pregnant. Baby Nell was born on October 6 and has been taking up a lot of time and energy since then, but Kay has been managing to balance it all and continue to spend some time in the neighborhood. The farm has also been a welcome refuge for community members and friends, especially for Jeff, who has been doing some serious fishing out there at every opportunity. Jann went to public school this year in Martinsdale after being homeschooled since kindergarten and made a happy adjustment although he is talking about possibly homeschooling again next year and taking part in selected school activities. So with Jann in school we have seen less of him around the house than of Kary, who falls right in with all the other kids every time they come over as though he had never left. Kay says Hi to all.



"I'D LIKE TO THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING FAMILY VALUES"

Emily Sims, one of this year's Brethren Volunteers, came and went since the last issue. Emily works with Clarion Alliance and next month will be going to Africa for a few months to do legal work for women with AIDS who are being discriminated against. From there she will be going to an Arab village in Palestine to do legal work on behalf of Arab Israelis.

Donna Henderson, who has been living in Washington DC since leaving the Worker several years ago to work with Christic Institute, is now working in DC in a minority women's law firm. She has been back a few times to visit over the past year and Joanne Talarico visited her in July to help celebrate her marriage to Chris Wainwright. Chris is a longtime friend of the house too and we wish them both the best.

Kari Fisher and her husband Jim Thom are living in a rural area of southern Illinois. Kari is working on her master's creative writing at the Univ. Illinois/Carbondale and has been teaching there but all of our conversations have really gotten hot on the subject of racism, poverty and racism. Since her drive for justice encompasses all she does she is giving out some unusual topics to her English comp classes and we hope her influence will bear fruit. We really miss Kari's forceful and impatient spirit as we try to find ways to address local issues and our country's approaching war.

Dennis McLaughlin and Kate Miller, both friends with deep and longstanding ties to our community, decided last month to get married in the fall. Kate, who has been living for several years on the south side, moved with her son Kevin to Truro for a couple of months and has now moved out to a trailer on the farm in Cumming where Dennis lives with his parents. All of us look forward to their Sunday evening visits, but no one more than the kids, who love this chance to play ball in the lot next to Dingman House.

We received a long letter from Mike Sprague who went to the Philippines as representative of Pax Christi to observe elections. Mike and Beth are living on a farm in South Dakota and Mike has been keeping himself free to plug in when needed for short periods of time, two or three months. We really appreciated his offer to come stay with us and help out toward the end of Jim's illness. Mike is also getting out Frank Cordano's newsletter, so anyone interested in receiving it should contact Mike at Route Box 54 A, Marlon, SD 57043.



BISHOP DINGMAN

JIM HARRINGTON

reflections



The Diocese of Des Moines and the Church in America lost one of its greatest and cherished leaders with the death of Bishop Dingman last February, a Bishop who fully embodied the spirit of Vatican II, a leader in the ecumenical movement, an advocate for the poor, the family farm, for women and for peace and justice. A truly pro-life bishop, pro-people of God who understood and listened to the people, trusting more in the Spirit than in a blind obedience to law and form. And we at the Des Moines Catholic Worker lost a dear and trusted friend and advocate.

JIM HARRINGTON: Jim Harrington was 57 years old when he came to the Catholic Worker. He had already lived a full life. A social worker by trade, he had a great mind and the political savvy to make things happen. He was one of the founding members of the Iowa chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. He was one of the major designers of the Iowa Welfare system during Johnson's War on Poverty years under Governor Harold Hughes.

Along with his sharp mind and political sense Jim had a deep love for the poor and the underdog. He always put the person ahead of the system. He was never satisfied with any agency or structure that he worked for, even the ones he helped to create. Consequently, he never got along well with authority figures.

Like the great prophets of the Old Testament, Jim's heart burned for the cause of justice. With a well-trained tongue, Jim could pierce the most sophisticated institutional mumbo-jumbo and get to the heart of the matter, to the people most in need and often neglected. He spent many of his later years before he got to the Catholic Worker working in Waterloo IA for Catholic Charities. By the time he got to the Worker he had pretty much burned all his bridges in the legitimate social welfare system, both Church and State.

Jim was a natural Catholic Worker. The Worker's radical personalism and its anti-cultural anti-establishment spirit was a perfect fit for Jim's prophetic spirit. His knowledge of the social welfare system was a great asset for the young members of the Catholic Worker community. He was the mentor and teacher for many of them through the years.

This year the Des Moines Catholic Worker lost in death two very important people, Bishop Maurice Dingman and Jim Harrington.

BISHOP DINGMAN: My favorite Bishop Dingman/Catholic Worker story was the time he came to the Catholic Worker to confirm Brent Vanderlinden into the Catholic faith. Brent was a community member who decided to join the Church. He took his instructions and asked Bishop Dingman to confirm him at the Catholic Worker at one of our Friday night masses. I was not there at the time. I was in jail for one of my periodic protests at SAC.

The Catholic Worker was packed the night the Bishop came. During the homily the Bishop talked about the meaning of confirmation, how the sacrament through the power of the Holy Spirit was meant to strengthen the faithful to more boldly and courageously follow in the footsteps of Jesus. He used my being in jail as an example of what a bold and courageous witness for Jesus might involve and the consequences that it might bring.

At communion time, the Bishop gave communion to everyone who wished to receive. At our Friday night masses that usually meant all who were there: guests, community members, neighbors, friends and supporters, regardless of rank, color or creed. At the mass that night were three Protestant ministers the Bishop knew well: Rev. Bob Cook, a Presbyterian minister, Rev. Chet Gwynn, a Methodist minister, and Rev. Suzanne Peterson, an Episcopal priest. The Bishop gave each of them communion.

After the mass, during the reception, Rev. Chet Gwynn came up to the Bishop and told him that he had confirmed Brent into the Methodist Church in Perry, IA, when he was in Junior High School. Bishop Dingman leaned over to Chet and said with a smile on his face, "Well ... let's hope it takes this time."

Bishop Dingman was the Des Moines Catholic Worker's first and most enthusiastic supporter. When I dropped out of the seminary in the Spring of 1976 I asked the Bishop if it would be all right if I came back to Des Moines to help start a Catholic Worker community. The Bishop welcomed the idea wholeheartedly. He was on hand to bless our first house and the next two to come on line. He wanted to be scheduled for our Friday night masses at least three or four times a year. He frequently just dropped in to visit unannounced, always with an encouraging word and a supportive spirit.

We were never an easy community to embrace. Our efforts in non-violent resistance were not always understood or welcomed by many Catholics in the Diocese. Our "bohemian" lifestyle, laid back liturgies and turbulent community life was often a scandal to some of the more traditional and conservative members of our diocesan family. The Bishop heard many rumors and listened to many complaints about the Catholic Worker. Yet his support of us and his defense of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker tradition never wavered. He was always there to give counsel and support.

Father Frank's just going to have to find himself another line, and that's all there is to it. When Frank gets out of jail this time he will be moving from Logan, the area where he has been serving since his ordination, to Council Bluffs where he will be serving with Msgr. Pfeffer. We (and Frank) had big hopes that he might wind up a little closer to home, but anyway he is glad to be in an urban situation again. The farewell mass at St. Anne's in Logan really had a lot of underlying sadness this time since Fr. Frank and the parish had just learned a few days previously that he was to be transferred.

Fr. Frank spent the first forty days of this six month sentence for his Holy Innocents witness at SAC in the Douglas County Correctional Facility, a fact he makes a point of mentioning whenever he talks about conditions at Yankton, the federal prison in South Dakota where he will be held for the duration, which should be till around the end of October. It seems Frank is doing embarrassingly easy time at Yankton, but we say Go for it. The prison is a converted college campus, a minimum security facility, and there is considerable freedom to get around. Last time he called, Frank was preparing the sermon he was going to be preaching the next day. Friends may remember that the last six month episode was a very different story, so we're really glad he's getting a break this time.

Friends can write Frank at this address: Fr. Frank Cordaro 13093-047; Durant #310; PPC, Yankton; PO Box 700; Yankton SD 57078 and receive his newsletter by writing Mike Sprong at Route 2, Box 54 A, Marion, SD 57043.



I saw Jim go through all the stages of community life during his stay at the Catholic Worker. At first he was mildly amused by all the youthful excess energy surrounding the everyday life of community living. Slowly but surely he became a central player, involved in the day-to-day issues and community battles that every Catholic Worker community goes through to keep a Catholic Worker going. Eventually, he became discouraged with the constant house struggles, one too many community fights. The last couple of years Jim was burned out on community living.



Yet, despite all the community hassles, Jim was always there for the real work. He continued to share in covering the house, doing the important work of hospitality. Guests would naturally be drawn to him. He always had their interests at heart, he knew the answers to many of their questions. Jim was at his best when he was an advocate for the poor he served.

Jim was also a great handyman. He had the practical skills and know-how to rehab houses. He often worked with rehabbing homes in the area for Habitat for Humanity. He and Wendy spent a summer in Mexico working on the house of Filomena Bojorquez's parents. The last and most ambitious project Jim completed was the rehabbing of the Bishop Dingman Catholic Worker house. It took a full two years to complete the job. He barely got it done before the cancer that took his life really kicked in.

Jim's cancer was a slow and drawn out affair. Yet it was in this last stage of his life that Jim took on a truly inspiring and heroic spirit. Always the prophet, in the last months of his life Jim let go of his harsh and rugged edges. A truly gentle and loving Spirit took over his whole being. He took major steps in reconciling himself to his family. He made peace with the Church, not the institutional Church, for that mattered little to him but the real Church, the community of faith. He received the sacraments and took the Eucharist every chance he could. He learned to count each and every day of life a blessing, no matter how painful the cancer hurt his body. He considered each person who came his way a true gift and a blessing from God. It was truly a great privilege to be with him during his last weeks of life.

Jim died on February 25th. He donated his body, what was left of it, to the Osteopathic College. We had a memorial mass for Jim at the Bishop Dingman Catholic Worker House. Many, many people came, and almost everyone had a Jim Harrington story to share. It was truly an uplifting service, one that Jim would have thought was too flattering and embarrassing but one that really captured and celebrated his good life. Thank you, Jim -- you will be missed but never forgotten.

by Frank Cordaro

Practicing Nonviolence

Bill Douglas, a long-time friend of the house, works with Criminal Justice Ministries and was arrested recently disrupting a City Council meeting to focus attention on the need for a Citizen Review Board.

by Bill Douglas

Judging from the Register's letters to the editor, the non-violent civil disobedience at recent Des Moines City Council meetings seems to have touched a nerve. Examining the objections to the actions may tell us something about us as a city and how far we have to go to become a community.

The objections fall into three general categories: that protests at meetings of elected officials are contrary to democracy, that "showy" protests are inappropriate, and that the actions are invalid because of the personalities of the participants.

The most serious charge is that protests are contrary to democracy because the City Council is an elected body. Never mind that elected representatives refused to meet with advocates for a citizen review board; officials once elected can apparently act with impunity toward those with whom they disagree. But the contention refuses to acknowledge any difference between representative and direct democracy.

The history of our country is replete with examples of when people had to insist on their rights to expand the democratic process over the objections of officials. When we think of democracy, we don't think of public official Bull Connor but of the non-violent demonstrators who endured police dogs and fire hoses to stand up for the right to be treated equally with other citizens; we don't think of the jailers but the suffragettes who went to jail for the right to vote; we don't think of the Supreme Court justices who handed down the Dred Scott decision declaring that African American slaves should be treated not as humans but as chattel, but of those who risked their lives and defied the law to bring escaped slaves to freedom; we don't think of the National Guard at U.S. Steel shooting strikers but of those who fell to achieve the right to strike.

Real democracy is messier than voting once every couple of years; it involves risk and struggle; dialogue and dissent; pushing boundaries that elected officials have erected to enshrine a status quo that is not always totally democratic or just. Democracy is frequently contested terrain between those with a stake in the present power relationships and those seeking to alter them.

A citizen review board would help resolve the contradiction between a democratic society and a hierarchically structured police department in favor of democracy. Our actions were an attempt to spark a larger outcry toward that end.

The fact that the protests were dramatic is inherent in their purpose of calling attention to the issue that seemed to be in danger of being brushed off by the council. But any disruption seems minimal compared to, say, if we had put up barricades and barbed wire on major downtown streets and left them up for a month to disrupt traffic. The council's response to the action also reveals a lack of creativity on the part of the city in dealing with protesters.

I DON'T HAVE OH, YES, SOR-
ALL DAY. YOU RY. I'LL BE
WANT TO BE PASSIVELY
ARRESTED OR RESISTING.
/ NOT?



We are also accused of being "so righteous" in our actions. That is a charge to defend against without sounding huffy, but surely there is nothing inherent in a civil-disobedience action that is so righteous. The charge seems designed to suggest that we think we know better than everyone else. It is a charge that can be leveled against anyone who follows his or her conscience.

In fact, it is an excuse for obedience and complacency when lack of response may be the real sin. Disciplined non-violent action is to be preferred to the rage of Los Angeles; a major reason for using non-violence as a strategy is that it admits to the tentativeness of all human actions and respects those who disagree.

Much of the criticism of the civil disobedience has taken the form of personal attacks. My observation is that egos, which are seen as assertive and persevering when encountered in white males, are considered fair grounds for attack when seen in people of color.

Risking arrest is one step in the process of change. It is not a substitute for continuing organizing; it is a way of keeping people alive. A long view of history suggests that people calling for more democracy will eventually prevail; in the meantime, keeping the struggle non-violent, persistent, and empowering will challenge the creativity and resourcefulness of all those committed to change.

UPDATE ON THE COUNTRY PRIEST



Fr. Frank Cordaro had to face a trial on May 15 for crossing the line last December. He was sentenced to his third term of six months in jail, treated and hand-cuffed like any other "criminal." The judge obviously was aware of the impact of these small non-violent actions on the military system: this sentence is meant to be a warning example to stop other people from following Fr. Frank in his struggle against the Nuclear Holocaust. Hopefully it will not stop them, as it will not stop Fr. Frank.

The previous judge saw him in the tradition of Dr. Martin Luther King. The new judge said he is just another law-breaker and put him in the same sentence of criminals and drug-dealers. The outcome is the same: six months, the highest sentence. There is no choice for the judge. Justice in this case seems to be nothing more than a system to protect the more powerful, not to find out the truth of a case and then make a just decision.

These were the first non-violent action and the first trial I went to visit in the United States. A lot of people ask me how I would compare them to my experiences in Germany.



Write to Frank at:
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I can't compare the US and Germany after four months in an objective way (and I couldn't do it after four years, either.) It was good for me to see that there are people in the States working for social justice and against the war machine as we try to do in Germany. Within our different societies we have to struggle with the same net of government, jurisdiction and big business. However, the German military seems to be a less solid block than the US military. The whole society in Germany seems to be less focussed on military as a result of World War II. A lot of people in Germany protested against the Gulf War. I met people who I would have never expected at a demonstration, telling me that they don't believe what the TV told us about the bombing of Baghdad, because they (or their parents, grandparents ...) survived the bombing of Nuernberg. But I'm afraid that this is not enough to stop the plans of our government and military to allow German troops out of the NATO area, which is still against our constitution. I'm afraid to hear people in Germany talk about our responsibility to send troops abroad, because I see what the concentration on military has done to the States. So I'm glad to see people working against these developments in Germany and the US and all over the world. If the governments are not able to work together, the people have to do it.

by Michael Poerzgen



when will we ever learn?

**PEACE VIGIL AT THE FEDERAL
BUILDING (2ND AND WALNUT)
--EVERY WEDNESDAY AT 4:30 PM**

**Don't be tempted by the shiny apple
Don't you eat of a bitter fruit
Hunger only for a taste of justice
Hunger only for a world of truth
'Cause all that you have is your soul**

**--Tracy Chapman
*All That You Have is Your Soul***

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